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Ben Weich

March 25, 2018

UK condemns UN Human Rights Council's dedicated Israel agenda

British diplomats said "little has changed" since they accused the UN Human Rights Council of anti-Israel bias last year



The UK has voted against two resolutions on Israel raised at the United Nations Human Rights Council (Photo: PA Images)

The UK government has attacked the UN Human Rights Council's agenda on Israel's actions in the West Bank, saying "little has changed" since its condemnation of bias against the Jewish state last year.

The UK delegation voted against two of five resolutions on Israel raised at the 37th session of the Human Rights Council (UNHRC) in Geneva on Friday.

The first was a motion calling for the withdrawal from the Golan Heights and the second called for an embargo on arms sales to Israel.

But UK diplomats supported a resolution urging a return to pre-1967 borders of the state of Israel, and one on human rights.

Each of the four resolutions, and one calling for the halt of settlement activity, were passed by the 47-member body. They were presented by the countries of the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation under Item 7, which requires a report on Israeli actions in the West Bank each time the panel meets.

Israel is the only country that has a dedicated agenda item at the council, a mechanism that the United States and the UK have criticised.

Last year the UK said it would vote against all future UNHRC resolutions on Israel's conduct in the occupied territories until the body ends its "disproportion and bias" against the Jewish state.

Diplomats said yesterday that the resolutions' credibility and impact were "repeatedly undermined" by the fact they were tabled under Item 7, adding that it "cannot continue".

But they added that votes against two of the resolutions were not votes against the "importance of accountability and justice in the Occupied Palestinian Territories", but rather a rejection of the UNHRC's "disproportionate focus on Israel".

The delegation added: "The disproportionate number of resolutions against Israel and the existence of a dedicated agenda item (Item 7) that singles out Israel does little to advance dialogue, stability or mutual understanding.

"Opposition to Item 7 is shared by many in this Council, but few are prepared to take action. This must change. Together we can achieve our collective goal of a Council that operates fairly, absent bias, and is without Item 7."

Jonathan Arkush, the president of the Board of Deputies, said his organisation was "proud of the UK government", condemning the UN as a "den of lies and bias".

He said: "Once again, countries with the worst of human rights records have sought to pass motions that abuse the platform of the United Nations by attacking Israel and attempting to distract from their own disgraceful conduct."

The United States and Australia, a new member to the UNHRC, were the only nations to oppose each of the five motions, echoing UK concerns on Item 7.

The US, which has assumed an antagonistic position towards the United Nations under the presidency of Donald Trump, said that it would continue to evaluate its membership of the UNHRC.

Nikki Haley, the US ambassador to the UN, said: “When the Human Rights Council treats Israel worse than North Korea, Iran, Syria, it is the Council itself that is foolish and unworthy of its name.

“It is time for the countries who know better to demand changes. Many countries agree that the Council’s agenda is grossly biased against Israel, but too few are willing to fight it.”

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